

**Effectiveness of Teaching English for Specific Purposes in Private Universities:  
Observations on selected institutions in Jakarta, Indonesia**

Rita Johan  
Gunadarma University, Jakarta, Indonesia

**Abstract:**

Teaching ESP is a major activity around the world today. It involves education, training and practice, and draws upon three major realms of knowledge: language, pedagogy and materials. ESP teachers need training in ways of describing, teaching, and designing language materials. They need some knowledge of, or at least access to get the information on, e.g. English for Economics, English for Physics, English for Laws, English for Medicine, etc.

What is specific and appropriate in one field might not be appropriate in other fields. There are many factors in ESP, such as analysis of language, syllabus, course design, methodology, materials, evaluation, and testing. The objectives should be exactly specified.

ESP is normally goal-oriented. It is based on a need analysis, which aims to specify as close as possible what exactly students have to master through the medium of English.

**Introduction**

Teaching ESP is a major activity around the world today. It involves education, training and practice, and drawing upon three major realms of knowledge: language, pedagogy, and materials. ESP teachers need training in ways of describing, teaching, and designing language materials. They need some knowledge, or at least access to get the information, e.g. English for Economics, English for Physics, English for Laws, English for Medicine, etc. Authentic materials, e.g. texts, recorded discussions, interviews, lectures may need to be developed as classroom materials. Thus, giving ESP may be seen as an implementation on materials in many areas. 'ESP' is an

abbreviation of 'English for Specific Purposes', and this implies that what is specific and appropriate in one field may not be appropriate in other fields.

There are many types of ESP. An important distinction must be made between students who are newcomers to their field of work or study and those who are already experts (or on the way becoming to). This distinction, as Strevens notes, 'is between English which is instructional and English which is operational' . Students who are newcomers to their fields may need some instructions in the concepts and practices of that field. Experienced students require operational ESP materials, where the knowledge, the concepts, the instruction and the training are taken for granted.

ESP is normally goal oriented. Students study English not because they are interested in the English language (or English-language culture) but because they need English for their studies or to get jobs. It has an implication on the kind of activities and topics in the course. ESP is based on the needs analysis, which aims to specify as closely as possible what the students need. There is a very clearly specified time period for the course. It means that the objectives should be closely specified and their realizations are related to the time available. This implies the collaboration and negotiation among all those involved with the course: organizers, teachers, sponsors, students, etc. The students on an ESP course are likely to be implied for adult rather than for children. It is often assumed that ESP is given to the students who are not beginners but the students should have already studied EGP (English for General Purposes) for some years. ESP courses may be given to students who have same backgrounds and they have the same types of jobs.

A number of people (Bewick, Brindley, Mountford, and Widdowson) have discussed the different meanings or types of needs. Firstly, needs can refer to students' study or job requirements, that is, what they have to be able to do at the end

of their language course. Secondly, it can mean 'what the user-institution or society at large regards as necessary or desirable to be learnt from program of language instruction' (Mountford). Thirdly, we can consider 'what the learner needs to do actually to acquire the language. This is a process-oriented definition of needs and relates to transitional behaviour, the means of learning' (Widdowson). Fourthly, we can consider what the students themselves would like to gain from the language course. This view of needs implies that students may have personal aims in addition to (or even in opposition to) the requirements of their studies or jobs. Bewick notes that such personal needs 'may be (and often are) devalued' by being viewed as 'wants or desire'. Finally, we may interpret needs as lacks, that is, what students do not know or cannot do in English.

Who carries out the needs analysis? It depends on the types of courses concerned. For a large institution or company, an outside expert may well be called in. The advantage of having outsiders to do the needs analysis is that he or she may be accorded special status and thus gain access to sources of information closed to the insiders. In many cases, however, the needs analysis are insiders, members of the institution who will run the ensuing course. Who provides the information for the needs analysis? The sources of information are the potential students, the language-teaching institution (teachers and administrators) and those who are concerned about the students' specific jobs or study situations.

### **The analysis of language for ESP**

ESP involves three realms of knowledge: language, pedagogy, and materials. The relationship between these is different from ESP courses and depends on the views of the course designers concerning the description of language. At the learning

stage, some advocates that students be exposed to the text selected and, through appropriate activities or tasks, acquire the target linguistic features.

The central belief of anyone involved with a language for special purposes (LSP) is that no language is monolithic; that is, all languages comprise many varieties. The problem, however, is to determine the degree to which the varieties of any language may differ from each other.

'Variety' is the most widely employed term and well-established distinction is made between varieties according to the user (e.g. regional, temporal, social, and sexual dialect) and varieties according to usage (e.g. in the workplace, at home, in social situations). However, whereas varieties according to user were formerly thought to be fairly unchanged, it is known that people can modify their original dialects. Conversely, the language used in the workplace, once thought to be confined to the work situations, can now be seen to affect a speaker's repertoire even in social situations. The distinction in linguistic usage between in the workplace and social situations is not always clear-cut as the analyst might wish it to be.

The final development is the concept of special language. Turner in a very thorough and useful exploration of the terms 'special language' and 'specific purposes' notes the rickety logical bridge from, for instance, "English for Bankers" (user) to "English in Banking" (domain), to arrive at "Banking English" (special language) (Turner). Special language or languages suggest the existence of general language or languages and LGP (language for general purposes).

For many people, vocabulary, particularly specialist vocabulary (or terminology), is a key element of ESP. Hoffman suggest that 'in teaching LSP, attention is sharply focussed on the acquisition of special vocabularies', ESP practitioners generally agree that the specialist level is not the one to focus on.

We should consider the structural patterns in which it occurs and the items with which it typically collocates. Roberts refers to 'complex terminological syntax' normally consisting of a key word (usually noun or verb) in collocation with an adjective, adverb, noun or verb, 'which together form a unit which is not only common in a given area but also serves to bring out the specialized sense of a given word'. One particular English structure which causes problems of identification and comprehension as a single lexical and conceptual unit is the nominal compound.

### **Syllabus and Courses Design for ESP**

It focuses on what is involved in designing and setting up an ESP course of program, the procedures that have been suggested and used and the types of syllabus. The term syllabus is referring to a plan of work to be taught in a particular course. In many American publications we can find curriculum used with approximately the same meaning. Recent publications, however, contain work by North American writers using curriculum more in the British sense, involving issues of policy, planning, and the complete educational environment.

ESP course design is the product of a dynamic interaction between a number of elements: the result of the needs analysis, the course designers' approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials. A syllabus is a lesson plan and it is important for the teachers, as a guideline and context for class content. There may be value in showing the syllabus to students, so that they can have a 'route map' of the course.

A basic distinction is between product syllabuses and process syllabuses. The language form consisting of an ordered set of language items, typically graded by difficulties of learning. The major innovation in ELT in the 1970s was the

development of the notional-functional syllabuses (Wilkins), in which the basic units are notions or concepts (e.g. time, space) or functions (e.g. greeting, asking, seeking clarification).

Situationally organized syllabuses can be found in English for business purposes. For some ESP situations, for example, in a business setting, the situations may be presented in the chronological order of a typical day's or week's work. More important for ESP, is the topic-based syllabus, which deploys the content of the students' work or specialist study. One objective of the ESP course may in fact be to teach this specialist content.

By 'language skills', White refers to the development, initially within ESP, of syllabuses focusing exclusively or principally on one of the four traditional language skills. The examples would be a course in writing business letters, or in oral skill for business people, or in academic reading. The actual content of course, however, might be language forms or functions, as in content-based syllabuses.

An important issue for ESP is the extent to which the development of cognitive skills should be an explicit part of the syllabus. Another set of skills which may form the focus for an ESP course are termed 'professional skills' or 'communication skills'. Linguistic accuracy is not ignored, but it is not the sole component.

We can distinguish two sub-categories, one being variously referred to as method, process or learning process and the other as task or procedure. That first refers to the process or method of learning (in this case language learning). The key feature of this approach is that what happens in the classroom is a matter for negotiations between the students and the teacher. There is thus a political approach, namely a redefinition of the authority relation in the classroom.

The procedural or task syllabus, consisting of a set of tasks or activities ordered according to cognitive difficulty, is associated in general ELT. A major concern throughout is that students understand the task and what they are doing, and do not act in a mechanical way. Such an approach is clearly significant for ESP, since the basic need of ESP students is that, using the medium of English, they should successfully perform a work or study task.

The decision as to which syllabus type or types to employ will result from a judicious consideration of the students' needs and the objectives of the course, together with the institutional bias of the teaching institution. The latter forms part of the context of the ESP course and should be considered next. Course design involves the theoretical decisions about objectives and syllabus into a context.

### **Methodology for ESP**

By methodology, it refers to what goes on in the classroom, to what the students have to do, it has implication for what the teacher has to do so. The key issues that we must consider in connection with methodology in ESP are the relationship between the method and the students' specialism, and the place and the nature of language practice. In addition, we might consider the relationship between acquisition and learning and between old and new knowledge and abilities.

The best overview of tasks can be found in Candling and Murphy. Candling offers the following 'working definition of language-learning task': One of a set of differentiated, sequenceable, problem-posing activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and

pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu. (Candling). Littlejohn and Hicks list the following criteria for task design:

- Extended discourse: learners should be involved in processing language beyond the sentenced level;
- Uncertainty: learners should be able to choose what they want to say;
- Goal orientation : there should be a purpose for communication;
- Real-time processing: the tasks should require learners to deal with language spontaneously.

Philips suggests that there are four key methodological principles as below:

- Reality control, which relates to 'the manner in which tasks are rendered accessible to the student;
- Non-triviality, the task must be meaningful generated by the students' special purpose;
- Authenticity, the language must be naturally generated by the students' special purpose;
- Tolerance of errors, errors which do not impede successful communication must be tolerated.

Role play involves the learner taking on a different role and even identity from his or her usual one. A simulation is frequently longer than a roleplay and can allow the students to maintain his or her normal personal.

The use of case studies is a well-established method for introducing future professional into the job demand of business, medicine, the law and engineering. It would seem to be an ideal method for ESP. It involves studying the facts of a real-life case, discussing the issues involved and reaching some kinds of discussion and/or action plan. All the language skills are potentially involved: reading input documents,



listening and speaking (discussing and possibly writing some sort of summaries or reports). Importantly for ESP, especially where mature and professionally well-qualified students are concerned, case studies draw upon students' professional know-how, utilizing the 'cognitive and behavioral styles' (Piotrowski) of their work rather than of the traditional language classroom. For students who are not yet fully qualified in their profession, the use of case studies helps to induct them into some aspects of the professional culture.

A project typically last several days or even weeks and involves students in some out-of-class activities. It has a clear target or end-product, most often a written report. As well as rehearsing a target activity, the project may also involve activation of all the language skills and, importantly, at the discretion of the student. For example, the student may have to decide whether certain information is best obtained by interviewing someone or by reading it.

Students doing a project may have to an oral presentation at the end, in addition to, or instead of, presenting a written report.

### **Material for ESP**

Basically, when we refer to using 'authentic materials' in ELT, we refer to use of print, audio, video and pictorial originally produced for purpose other than the teaching of language. Additionally for ESP, we must consider whether the goals that we set are authentic with regard to students' real-world roles, and whether the task or activities that take place in the learning situation are authentic. The important questions to ask are how such authentic goals, tasks and materials should be selected and how they are realized within the language classroom. For Widdowson, authenticity does not lie in the materials themselves but is created by the reader's

response. The language teacher's task is to help the students develop an awareness of those conventions. The questions then are as follows: what should be used, and what relationship does it have with the authentic materials? Authentic materials, however selected, will not work well in the classroom unless the methodology is carefully considered. The danger existing in interesting-looking authentic materials are used in an uninteresting way because there are too much preparing time has been spent in looking for the materials and not enough in considering their exploitation.

Evaluation can be defined as "the discovery of the value of something for some purposes". A basic distinction is made between formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is carried out during the life of a course or project and the result obtained can be used to modify what is being done. Summative evaluation, on the other hand, is carried out when the course or project is finished and when it is clearly too late to do any 'fine tuning'. Rather, a decision will be taken as to whether to repeat the course or not, or, in the case of a 'one off' course, whether money has been well spent or not. A type of summative evaluation is not often feasible, and therefore not often carried out, would occur some times after the end of the course.

A further distinction can be made between the process and the product evaluation. A process evaluation may concern with teaching and learning strategies or processes, and administrative and decision-making processes. A product evaluation are student's product such as examinations results, essays, etc.

It is useful to pose a series of 'wh-' questions to guide one through the essential points related to evaluation:

- Why carry out an evaluation?
- What is the subject of the evaluation?
- Who carries out the evaluation?

- How is the evaluation carried out?
- What next: what will happen to the result?

#### **Final remarks**

As we know that teaching ESP is not easy. English teachers should master the language and also the content of the specific fields. If the teachers has the same backgrounds, it is easier to run the course. Here are some observations of ESP teaching in some places by the writer:

- Teachers do not come from the same backgrounds.
- ESP teachers in some universities do not master the terms in the fields.
- Most of the teachers master the language as they are graduated from the English department or language institute.
- They teach grammar instead of the terms or texts related to the student's field.

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